

Testimony in Support of LD 1975

Good afternoon Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Genevieve Lysen, I have been in sustained recovery for 11 years, I am a certified recovery coach and I am the Organizing Director for the Maine People's Alliance. Our 32,000 members stretch from Kittery to Fort Kent. We are committed to creating a state of Maine where everyone has what they need, everyone contributes what they can, and no one is left behind.

I am pleased to be here to testify today in favor of LD 1975.

We can all agree that we are losing far too many Mainers to drug poisoning: 2 people every day. They were our friends, sisters, brothers, cousins, co-workers, neighbors, parents, and children. Maine's punitive drug possession laws don't help people recover from substance use disorder, and that hurts everyone. We need to provide compassionate care and supportive services, not jail cells and felony records. The resources we use arresting and jailing people for drug possession would be much more effective if we reinvested them in a public health response, as this bill proposes to do. We support policies that prioritize compassionate care over criminalization.

The last time this committee heard a version of this bill my cousin Samuel testified before this committee. He can't be here today because Samuel died alone in his home, due to an accidental drug-poisoning. Sam and I grew up together in Lewiston. I'm an only child and Sam was like a brother to me when I was a kid. He was 34 years old when he died. Like I do, Sam struggled with depression issues, and a substance use disorder. Sam's experiences over the years with the courts and law enforcement made him feel worthless, hopeless, like a criminal, when he needed support, help and love. When Sam died he was 4 years into recovery and re-establishing a close, loving relationship with his son, Milo. If Sam had been able to access services he needed to sustain his recovery, I expect he would be alive today. Establishing receiving centers and moving state resources to local agencies who are providing recovery and harm reduction services would be a good first step in shifting our approach to a public health one.

I urge the committee to support LD 1975.

Thank you for your time today.

Genevieve Lysen, Lewiston
Organizing Director
Maine People's Alliance